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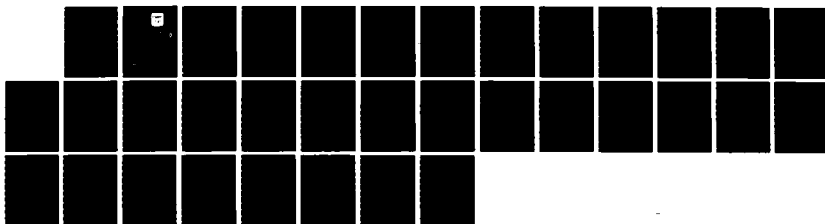
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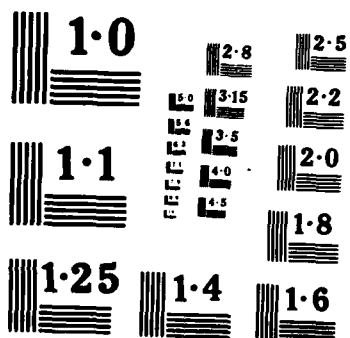
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# STUDENT ESSAY

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NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY: MEXICO

BY

LIEUTENANT COLONEL HUGH SCRUGGS

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imposed by lending nations to reschedule payment of the monumental external debt have exacerbated an already grim economic situation that is leading to popular dissatisfaction with the government's economic policies and the possibility of violent internal dissention. The Mexican military's organization, equipment, and deployment are well suited to the successful accomplishment of its internal security mission and it should be able to maintain internal security. A long-term threat perceived by Mexicans is the East-West conflict developing in Central America as the superpowers intervention in regional struggles for economic reform and social justice is leading to radicalization and militarization of opposing sides. The ensuing bloody conflict hinders the peaceful settlement of issues through negotiation and compromise. Refugees from the struggle in Guatemala are bringing this reality to southern Mexico. An armed revolution in Mexico, should one develop, would severely challenge the Mexican armed forces due to its deficiencies in numbers, equipment, tactical mobility, and fire power.

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USAWC MILITARY STUDIES PROGRAM PAPER

NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY: MEXICO

INDIVIDUAL ESSAY

by

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1 April 1986

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## ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Hugh F. Scruggs, LTC, IN

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— The purpose of this project is to examine the major threats to the national security and sovereignty of Mexico and to determine the capability of the Mexican armed forces to meet these threats. Through literary research and interviews with Mexican desk officers at the Department of State, information was collected on social, military, political, and economic factors which affect Mexican national security issues. Mexicans perceive a threat to national security from the current economic crisis. Austerity measures imposed by lending nations to reschedule payment of the monumental external debt have exacerbated an already grim economic situation that is leading to popular dissatisfaction with the government's economic policies and the possibility of violent internal dissension. The Mexican military's organization, equipment, and deployment are well suited to the successful accomplishment of its internal security mission and it should be able to maintain internal security. A longer term threat perceived by Mexicans is the East - West conflict developing in Central America as the superpowers intervention in regional struggles for economic reform and social justice is leading to radicalization and militarization of opposing sides. The ensuing bloody conflict hinders the peaceful settlement of issues through negotiation and compromise. Refugees from the struggle in Guatemala are bringing this reality to southern Mexico. An armed revolution in Mexico, should one develop, would severely challenge the Mexican armed forces due to its deficiencies in numbers, equipment, tactical mobility, and fire power. —

## NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY: MEXICO

Mexico is located to the South of the United States with the two countries sharing a 2,000 mile undefended border. It is the eleventh most populous country in the world with approximately 80 million people or one-third the population of the United States.<sup>1</sup> Encompassing 756,066 square miles of territory, Mexico is the third largest country in North America.<sup>2</sup> Located between 16 and 32 degrees north latitude and with terrain ranging from coastal lowlands to mountain plateaus one mile above sea level and a central cordillera with peaks in excess of 15,000 feet in elevation, Mexico has a varied climate. Nearly 25% of the country is a wasteland.

Mexico's population is composed of 60% Mestizo, 30% Indians, and 10% Caucasians.<sup>3</sup> Although Spanish is the official language, about 8% of the population, primarily Indians in the border areas with Guatemala, speak only an Indian dialect.<sup>4</sup> Mexico has mandatory education for ages 5 to 16, but 25% of the population is illiterate.<sup>5</sup> Since the implementation of a government sponsored birth control program in the 1970's, the population growth rate has slowed from 3.4% to 2.5% annually.<sup>6</sup> The population has quadrupled from 20 million in 1940. The median age is just over 17 years. The tremendous size of child-bearing age population entering the job market places unremitting pressure upon the government to curb the population explosion and to stimulate sufficient economic growth to employ the expanding work force. The government faces a significant challenge in this area -for each new job created in the Mexican economy in 1985 there were 500 births.<sup>7</sup>

Mexico is a relatively wealthy country when compared to the nations of Latin America and has the highest per capita Gross National Product



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(GNP) with a figure in excess of \$2,500.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, this figure does not represent the distribution of wealth. A small portion of the population controls a huge portion of national wealth. Approximately 60% of the Mexican people struggle for subsistence. Nearly 50% of the work force is unemployed or underemployed.<sup>9</sup> The poorest 40% of the population receives only 9% of the national income.<sup>10</sup> Economically, Mexico is generally considered to be a Third World developing economy. The current GNP of \$168 billion makes it the fifteenth largest economy in the world.<sup>11</sup> The GNP had been increasing at an impressive rate of 6% annually until 1982 when the international recession and falling oil prices combined to stagnate economic growth. Based upon Mexico's capacity to repay a high level of debt with oil revenues from sales at the 1982 prices, it was able to amass an external debt that has currently grown to nearly \$100 billion. A considerable amount of this debt is held by banks in the United States--the nine largest banking institutions in the United States hold about \$15 billion of Mexico's debt or nearly 35% of the combined net worth of these banks.<sup>12</sup> In 1982, Mexico suspended payment of principal on its debt and renegotiated its repayment schedule. Since then, it has had to make further borrowings to meet the \$10 billion annual interest payments. Further renegotiation of debt could result in increased external influence to implement additional economic austerity programs that would further restrict domestic economic growth, but enhance debt repayment, and make Mexico conform to the international political views of the lending countries.

Mexico contains a wealth of national resources with petroleum being the most important. In 1938 President Lazaro Cardenas expropriated the

assets of seventeen foreign oil companies to include major United States companies and formed a national oil company--Petroleos Mexicanos (PEMEX)--from these assets. Through a combination of factors to include exhaustion of old oil fields, increased domestic consumption, and an inefficient oil exploration program, Mexico became a net importer of petroleum in 1968.<sup>13</sup> Due to discoveries from a revitalized exploration program and increased production from new fields primarily in the Southeastern states of Tabasco, Campeche, and Chiapas, Mexico again became a net exporter of oil in 1973 just as the energy crisis with its sky rocketing oil prices appeared on the international scene. Mexico continued to enjoy tremendous success with its exploration program and was able to announce probable oil reserves of 250 billion barrels by 1980.<sup>14</sup> This placed Mexico fourth among countries with the largest oil reserves. Also by 1981 Mexico had moved into fifth place among the oil producing countries and is capable of sustaining this rate of production for the foreseeable future.<sup>15</sup> The United States had become Mexico's largest customer and purchases 50 -60% of its oil exports.<sup>16</sup> Natural gas resources are plentiful and conveniently located within easy access to United States markets through pipelines in southern Texas. Exporting natural gas to the United States is another vital source of revenue.

Not only are the United States and Mexico closely tied by concerns for Mexico's external debt and petroleum resources, the economies of the two countries are inextricably linked. Mexico is the United States third largest trading partner after Canada and Japan.<sup>17</sup> The United States accounts for more than 60% of Mexican imports and 58% of Mexican

exports.<sup>18</sup> Also, many US firms have established Mexican subsidiaries to take advantage of lower operating costs in Mexico. In addition, the National Academy of Sciences estimates that there are between 1.5 and 3.5 million illegal Mexican aliens in the United States who perform essential low skilled jobs in the United States and provide a significant source of income to Mexican families in the form of wages sent home.<sup>19</sup> The supply of cheap labor is just as important to the United States as the availability of employment for idle labor is to Mexico.

After a bitter internecine revolution at the turn of the century, Mexico finally proclaimed its third constitution in 1917 and has continued as a federal republic under it since.<sup>20</sup> Although the basic organization of the Mexican government is similar to that of the United States with a division of powers among the executive branch, bicameral legislature, and judiciary, a major difference lies in the amount of authority residing within the office of the chief executive.<sup>21</sup> The president is elected for one six-year term and cannot be reelected.<sup>22</sup> He has the authority to remove members of the judiciary and state officials, and to dissolve state governments under certain conditions. This constitution has facilitated political stability in Mexico since 1917 and has fostered the orderly transfer of power from one elected government to another.

Another key difference is that Mexico has a one party system. The Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) has been the dominant political force since its formation in 1929. Its candidates continually win all elections. The PRI views itself as a force for social revolution and follows a moderately liberal policy. The success of the PRI has been

based upon its ability to coopt emerging sources of opposition and assimilate them into the party.

The party is divided into three sectors - agriculture, labor, and popular--which share power and develop policies.<sup>23</sup> The PRI holds a National Assembly every six years to select a presidential candidate and to formulate and approve party policies.<sup>24</sup> In addition to selecting a presidential candidate, the PRI selects a National Committee to represent the party between National Assemblies and a National Executive Committee which interfaces with the government concerning party policies.<sup>25</sup> Due to the close ties between the PRI and the government, the chairman of the National Executive Committee is generally recognized as the second most powerful person in Mexico after the president. The overwhelming popularity of the PRI and its ability to minimize competition from the opposition were demonstrated in the latest national elections in which the PRI won all of the seven state governorships and 295 of 300 seats in the Chamber of Deputies.<sup>26</sup>

The PRI has proven itself adept at coopting the opposition and incorporating it into the PRI. On the other hand, it has made an effort to encourage political opposition and to provide the opposition a legal means to express its collective opinion. Recently, Mexico set aside 100 of the 400 Chamber of Deputy positions for opposition party members.<sup>27</sup> These seats are allocated to the opposition parties based upon the percentage of popular vote the parties receive. The National Action party (PAN) with a middle-class conservative constituency is the largest opposition party.

In the early days of the PRI, the military dominated the political scene. Initially, the military, although dominant, shared power with

the agriculture and labor sectors of the PRI. Ironically, it was a military man General Lazaro Cardenas, who as president from 1935 to 1940 eliminated the preeminence of the military in political affairs. In 1938 he institutionalized control of the military by creating a fourth sector--popular sector. Party bylaws awarded each of the four sectors--military, agriculture, labor, and popular--an equal number of party representatives and assigned the respective sectors certain public offices to fill. Other accomplishments of President Cardenas were his stripping power from rival general officers and his successful efforts to professionalize and depoliticize the officer corps. Although President Cardenas selected General Avila Comacho as his successor for the period 1940 to 1946, political power was primarily in the hands of civilians when he left office.

General Avila Comacho was the last military officer to be president. Ironically, it was this president--a military officer--who administered the coup de grace to the military's political clout by abolishing the military sector from the PRI.<sup>28</sup> Although the military's political influence has been greatly reduced from the position of power it held until 1940, the military continues to have an important political role. Military officers are routinely named to important government positions and, frequently, are nominated and elected to key government offices such as state governor. Also, military zone commanders, with zones which generally correspond to state boundaries, are propitiously located to be designated as presidential agents to replace state governors during crisis situations. Additionally, military zone commanders in their role as commander of the National Military Service and Rural Defense Corps--a paramilitary, peasant based organization--in their zone

probably have better access to political concerns of the lower classes than the civilian leadership and provide a valuable source of political intelligence to the government and afford the lower classes an alternate path to the federal government decision makers. The zone commanders report to the president through the Minister of Defense and are not responsible to the state governors.<sup>29</sup>

The Mexican military is one of the smallest in the world on a percentage of national population basis, with .15% of the national population under arms.<sup>30</sup> This small military is the result of being a next door neighbor to the United States. Through its fortuitous geographical location along the southern border off the United States, Mexico enjoys a considerable security from external threats to its sovereignty because the United States would view a threat to Mexico from an external power inimical to the vital interests of the United States and would support Mexico against the threat. Additionally, Mexico's military is small due to the realization that Mexico could not compete in an arms race with the United States and it would be futile to develop a military capability in excess of that needed for internal security and a possible threat to its southern border with Guatemala. Furthermore, along with the decline of the military's political influence, came a corresponding decrease in governmental resources devoted to the military. This trend has begun to reverse itself in the past few years, but the huge national debt and the governments' need to commit significant resources to social and economic programs will deter a large scale commitment of resources to a military build up except for a national crisis requiring a strong military capability. In 1985, Mexico spent approximately \$1.09 billion on the

military budget. This expenditure supports an armed force consisting of 147,000 regular soldiers and 250,000 part-time conscript militiamen.<sup>31</sup>

The role of the Mexican military has been defined by the constitution - defend the national sovereignty and independence, maintain the constitution and laws, and ensure internal security.<sup>32</sup> Traditionally the military has concentrated on the last two requirements and has not had to face a serious external threat to its sovereignty and independence. To maintain the constitution and ensure internal security, the military has conducted counter-insurgency operations, anti-narcotic campaigns, civic action programs, riot suppression, mob control, and similar security operations. In addition, the zone commanders and staffs have been a form of "shadow" government to back up the state governments in crisis situations.

To accomplish its mission the military has organized its 147,000 regular servicemen into three services - Air Force, Army, and Navy. The Army is by far the largest service with 120,000 soldiers.<sup>33</sup> The Navy has 20,000 servicemen including the Marine Corps and Naval Aviation and the Air Force has the remaining 7,000 regular service.<sup>34</sup> In addition to its regular forces, Mexico has 250,000 soldiers in the National Guard and 120,000 members in the Rural Guard.

The Army has one mechanized infantry brigade, two infantry brigades, one airborne brigade, and zonal units consisting of 23 independent cavalry regiments, 64 independent infantry battalions, and 3 artillery regiments.<sup>35</sup> The zonal units are spread throughout the country in 36 military zones and fall under the command of the zone commander of the zone in which the unit is located.<sup>36</sup> Zone boundaries generally follow state boundaries except for the states of Chiapas, Guerrero, and

Vera Cruz, each of which has been divided into two military zones.<sup>37</sup>

The disposition of small units throughout the country is consistent with the Army's mission to insure internal security.

Also, the Army's equipment inventory supports its internal security mission. The internal security mission is manpower intensive and Mexico has spent the majority of its military budget on personnel, not equipment. Reports of modernization of the Mexican military may be misleading. In addition to a possible small increase in numbers of soldiers, Mexico has embarked on a modest program to upgrade its military hardware, but equipment purchases and production agreements have been primarily for unsophisticated equipment to replace antiquated equipment. Very little high technology equipment has been purchased. Mexico has made an arrangement with Germany to produce locally the G-3 automatic rifle and with France to produce the DN III armored personnel carrier.<sup>38</sup> Mexico's equipment list includes 64 light and medium tanks of United States manufacture and of World War II and Korean War vintage; 70 armored personnel carriers of European manufacture; 80 armored cars of European manufacture; and various 75 and 105 millimeter howitzers of United States manufacture.<sup>39</sup>

The Navy, with a total of 20,000 servicemen, has been organized into eight naval zones - four on each coast.<sup>40</sup> Zone commanders report to the president through the Minister of the Navy. The Navy's major items of equipment include three destroyers, six frigates, six corvettes, and 80 patrol craft.<sup>41</sup> The small naval air force has 21 transport aircraft of various sizes, 10 helicopters, eight "albatross" reconnaissance aircraft, and four trainers.<sup>42</sup> Essentially, Mexico has a brown water navy that can support internal security operations, but



has little power projection capability.

The Air Force, having 7,000 servicemen, is organized into six counter-insurgency squadrons, one training squadron, two search and rescue squadrons, four transport squadrons, one presidential transport squadron, and one photographic reconnaissance squadron.<sup>43</sup> The equipment inventory of major items lists 79 counterinsurgency/training aircraft of various kinds including 10 modern F-5E Tiger interceptors of United States manufacture; six search and rescue helicopters of French manufacture; 59 transport aircraft of assorted manufacture; and 32 helicopters of French and United States manufacture.<sup>44</sup> Although the F-5E's capabilities surpass equipment of Central American air forces, the remainder of the equipment supplies adequate air support and battlefield mobility to meet internal security requirements.

In addition to the regular forces, Mexico has 250,000 part-time conscript soldiers in the National Military Service program.<sup>45</sup> All Mexican males must register with the National Military Service in January of the year they become 18 years old.<sup>46</sup> From this manpower pool, a certain number of youths are selected annually to train with active units for 38 weekends per year until they reach 38 years of age at which time they are discharged.<sup>47</sup> These soldiers serve under the command of their zone commander and represent a sizeable reserve force that would be available during emergencies.

Also, Mexico has a rural militia to augment the regular and reserve forces when required. The inception of the rural militia occurred during the 1910 Revolution to insure that the redistribution of land from large haciendas was not hindered by the private armies of the

large landowners.<sup>48</sup> The rural militia or Rural Defense Corps was composed mostly of peasants who had received land or individual or collective cultivation rights on state-owned land. These units receive their direction from the military zone commander and are primarily used today to help maintain public order in remote rural areas, act as guides for regular forces when needed, and participate in military sponsored civic action programs. Also, these forces serve as the eyes and ears of the government in rural areas and provide a vital source of political intelligence either through the military to the national government or through the peasant sector to the PRI. The Rural Defense Corps is comprised of about 120,000 members -40,000 infantry and 80,000 mounted -who enlist for a three year term.<sup>49</sup> They are generally organized into 11 man platoons and receive only the most basic military training.<sup>50</sup> Members of the Rural Defense Corps are not paid but do receive other benefits and an old weapon when they join.

The Mexican military leadership comes from a lower middle-class socio-economic background and a professional military career is viewed as providing upward social mobility. Access to the Mexican officer corps is surprisingly open. Over 90% of commissions in the Mexican officer corps are awarded to the graduates of the three military academies (Army, Navy and Air Force). Admission to the academies is open to natural born Mexican males between the ages of 16 and 21 who have successfully completed secondary school and have achieved a high percentile score on a rigorous competitive examination.<sup>51</sup>

Noncommissioned officers who show leadership potential are selected to attend an officer preparatory course at the Heroes Military College.<sup>52</sup> The enlisted personnel who become commissioned officers receive equal

consideration with all officers for promotion and key duty positions. In 1983, 36% of the top 25 jobs in the Ministry of Defense were held by officers with enlisted experience.<sup>53</sup>

The officers who graduate from the military academies form a strong bond during those four arduous years and stay close in the years following graduation. Because promotions to grade of lieutenant colonel are based upon time in service and successful completion of an achievement test, each class is promoted at the same time and follows similar career patterns. This forges a close knit officer corps that shares common values and similar military experiences.

Mexico has developed an extensive military schooling system for its officers. The Superior War College trains officers with five to ten years of service in a three year curriculum on command and staff procedures.<sup>54</sup> The attrition rate of this school is greater than 50%.<sup>55</sup> Graduates of this school are virtually assured of promotion to the grade of colonel and are considered to be a member of the military elite. Again, a close bond is formed between students during the three year program that develops a strong feeling of camaraderie at the highest level of the officer corps.

A significant development in the officer training program occurred in 1981 when the National Defense College was established for senior military officers.<sup>56</sup> The curriculum consists of force development, national defense strategy, international affairs, and resource management. Selection for this school is highly competitive and graduates are earmarked to become Mexico's next generation of military leaders. The significance of this course is that, for the first time, national military strategy is being taught to the elite of the officer

corps and it indicates that Mexico is becoming aware of the external environment in the region. This training may be critical in the formulation of a military strategy to meet the challenges that Mexico will encounter in the next few years.

Along with many other potential power centers, the military has been successfully coopted by the PRI. It has been coopted to a large extent by frequent and generous pay raises, the socio-economic upward mobility offered by a military career, modest increases in military expenditures for modernization, and a sharing of power by the PRI with the military through appointment of officers to key government positions.<sup>57</sup> The common view at the present time is that the military is the guardian of the political system and protects against such destabilizing threats as rebellious peasants, radical students, and narcotic traffickers. The military has been coopted by the PRI and become identified with the government. The likelihood of a military coup is remote at the present time.

Currently Mexico is faced with two major challenges to its sovereignty--one is the current economic crisis and the other is the East - West confrontation unfolding in Central America. The immediate challenge is the economic crisis that resulted from the international economic recession in 1982 and was further aggravated by the recent precipitous decline in world oil prices. The threat to Mexico's sovereignty from an economic crisis is the internal instability created by the mass of unemployed reacting to the government's loss of control over internal and international economic affairs, due to the influence of countries holding Mexico's external debt over the conduct of Mexico's economic and political policies. When Mexico defaulted on its external

debt in 1982, negotiations with the lending nation's required Mexico to implement certain austerity measures to include a sharp reduction of imports in order to make its revised debt repayment schedule.<sup>58</sup> The reduction of imports led to rampant inflation that reached more than 100% annually by the end of 1982 and has gradually subsided to a 60% annual rate by 1985.<sup>59</sup> Paradoxically, the high inflation rate spurred the massive flight of capital from Mexico--estimated to be \$33 billion in the last five years with most to the United States--to more economically stable countries. These funds are desperately needed to support domestic economic development.<sup>60</sup> With the recent disastrous earthquake in Central Mexico and the continuing depressed prices of crude oil, Mexico's ability to continue paying the \$10 billion annual interest on its external debt is in doubt and further austerity measures and political concessions may be required by lending nations of Mexico to renegotiate the repayment schedule.<sup>61</sup> Publicly, Mexico has announced that it must borrow at least \$10 billion in the next three years in order to meet the debt repayment schedule at a time when lending countries are reluctant to extend further credit.<sup>62</sup> To sum up, Mexico is in a difficult situation with a high inflation rate, stiff international pressure to continue repayment of its external debt, a 50% unemployment and underemployment rate, widespread poverty, plunging oil revenues, and a substantial flight of capital to foreign countries.

The probable short term results of this economic crisis will be a low level of unorganized political dissent in the form of riots, demonstrations, and mob violence directed against PRI and government agencies. In an environment of unorganized internal dissent, the

Mexican military's challenge will be to control the level of violence in order to prevent the major destruction of public and private property and the loss of life. The military's organization, equipment, and disposition throughout the country are suited to the conduct of internal security operations and the military should be able to accomplish its internal security mission.

In the longer term, the economic crisis could lead to a challenge to the PRI supremacy from minor political parties capitalizing on the PRI's inability to resolve the economic crisis. In the current political environment dissenting opinions of minority parties are provided a legal outlet through representation in the Chamber of Deputies. Thus opposition to the PRI supremacy can be manifested at the polls. Violent confrontations may occur if political frustrations rise. As long as peaceful dissent is permitted and the possibility of transferring government control to another political party through the democratic process exists, the military will not interfere in the political process. The general view of international political experts is that the economic situation is grim but the PRI will continue to muddle through this crisis as it has so many others in the last 50 years.

The second major threat to Mexico's sovereignty, and the most acute in the long term, is the East - West confrontation that is beginning to unfold in Central America. From the Mexican perspective, regional struggles to obtain social and economic justice for the lower economic classes are being turned into a confrontation in which external support of the conflict by the superpowers leads to a protracted armed conflict that polarizes the competing factions and reduces the likelihood of a negotiated settlement. Further, Mexico is becoming concerned with the

armed insurgency in Guatemala that has spilled over the border into southern Mexico.

Mexico's stated national policy for the regional conflict is nonintervention, with each country allowed to determine its own destiny without external interference.<sup>63</sup> This policy is derived from Mexico's experience in its revolution in 1910 when foreign intervention in the internal struggle for social justice and economic reform led to the polarization and militarization of competing factions that resulted in a protracted conflict with many bloody and costly battles. President de la Madrid expressed Mexico's opposition to external intervention in the region based on a sincere concern for the disastrous social, economic, and political consequences for the people and not upon any direct threat to Mexico from foreign intervention.<sup>64</sup> Substantial external intervention will result in a destabilizing regional arms build up, a disruption of international trade, and a stagnation of social, economic, and political development.<sup>65</sup> President de la Madrid has stated that, although Mexico would probably experience adverse internal effects from a regional conflict, the level of economic development, the resilient political process, and Mexico's democratic institutions will guarantee Mexico's internal security and lead to a strengthening of Mexican nationalism.<sup>66</sup>

Mexico's national policy of regional nonintervention has led to its active participation in the Contadora Group, along with the countries of Colombia, Panama, and Venezuela. The purpose of the Contadora Group is to negotiate a settlement to the conflict in the region that will result in the exclusion of foreign military advisors from the region to include those of the United States, establishment of demilitarized zones

as required, elimination of arms trafficking, and prohibition of external intervention into the internal affairs of any country in the region.<sup>67</sup> Although the Contadora Group has received considerable support from the international community, it has achieved the little success in resolving the regional conflict.

Mexico's policy of nonintervention in the internal affairs of another country is beginning to confront the reality of an armed insurgency with East - West overtones that is spilling over into Mexico from Guatemala. Thousands of Guatemalan refugees have crossed the border into Mexico, primarily into the state of Chiapas, to escape the harsh counterinsurgency measures employed by the Guatemalan armed forces to suppress a leftist revolution. Guatemalan charges that guerrillas are using the refugee camps as support bases have created considerable tension between Mexico and Guatemala. Also, there is some concern in the Mexican government that the Guatemalan refugees could serve as a catalyst for their Mexican cousins to begin a revolt against the Mexican government.

Historically, the population of Chiapas have more in common with Guatemala than Mexico. In the pre-colonial era the border area was part of the Mayan civilization and the Indian population in Guatemala and southern Mexico continues to speak a Mayan dialect.<sup>68</sup> During the colonial era Chiapas was part of the Captaincy General of Guatemala for about 300 years before its population voted to join Mexico when the region gained its independence from Spain in the 1820's.<sup>68</sup> In addition to the cultural similarities, the Indians of Guatemala and Mexico share a life of abject poverty with Chiapas being one of the poorest states in Mexico.



The increased tensions in the border area with Guatemala over allegations of refugee support for Guatemalan insurgents and the possibility of a revolution in Mexico instigated by refugees have led Mexico to take action in the area. In early 1981, Mexico attempted to expel the refugees from Chiapas but stopped after an outburst of national and international protest. In late 1981 in an attempt to demonstrate to Guatemala that the refugee camps were not guerrilla bases, Mexico conducted military exercises in the border area and invited Guatemala to send military observers.<sup>70</sup> These exercises did not convince the Guatemalans that the refugee camps were free of guerrilla influence and reports of raids by Guatemalan troops on the refugee camps in Mexican territory continue, although no military confrontation has occurred between Mexican and Guatemalan forces. In 1984, Mexico made a decision to relocate approximately 50,000 refugees to a remote location in the state of Campeche along the Caribbean coast far away from the Guatemalan border.<sup>71</sup> Present estimates are that about one-half of the refugees have been relocated. Also, the Mexican Army changed troop disposition and command arrangements in order to enhance stability. Chiapas was divided into two military zones and the number of troops was increased from 3,000 to 8,000 - a significant increase in troops when compared to the overall strength of the Mexican Army.<sup>72</sup> Present military policy in Chiapas is to maintain a low-key presence in the border area by keeping Mexican troops some distance from the border in order to avoid a military confrontation with Guatemala and to devote more resources to civic action programs in the border area in order to insure Indian support of the government.<sup>73</sup>

Although Mexico has many conditions such as widespread poverty, social injustice, and guerrilla activity in the border area with Guatemala that could lead to an armed insurrection, Mexico does not have an immediate threat to its national security from an insurgency. The leadership for an armed insurgency in Mexico is not present and potential insurgent leaders are not in training in Cuba or other Communist states. Some speculation exists that Mexico's support for Cuba in the international arena is based upon a tacit understanding with Cuba that it will not meddle in the internal affairs of Mexico.<sup>74</sup> Internal opposition leadership is encouraged to use the democratic process to achieve political objectives and the Mexican political system has been sufficiently flexible to meet enough of the needs of the opposition to keep their political activity legal and peaceful within the government's democratic framework. Without dedicated leadership a viable insurgency is unlikely to develop quickly.

The military's capability to handle an insurgency, should one develop, would depend upon the rapidity of the development of the insurgent strength and the popular support it could engender. Factors which would limit the armed forces capability to counter an insurgency include small regular forces, old military equipment, limited tactical mobility, and inadequate fire support. The military's strength, equipment, and disposition have been keyed to the mission of internal security. Redeployment of regular forces to support counterinsurgency operations would reduce the military's capability to provide for internal security nationwide and the military is not large enough to counter a large scale insurgency without considerable expansion. Although Mexico has had a modest modernization of its military, it is

still deficient in fire power and tactical mobility and its equipment reserves consist of outdated equipment. Mexico has few helicopters to rapidly move troops in remote rural areas with a limited road network. El Salvador, a much smaller country, has a helicopter fleet larger than Mexico. A continuation of the current economic crisis would make it difficult for Mexico to obtain funding to support expansion or modernization of its armed forces.

There are several positive factors in the Mexican situation that would enhance the prospects of success against an insurgency. Leadership, particularly at battalion and brigade level, is a key ingredient in successful counterinsurgency operations and leadership at this level is usually developed over a period of several years with the experience gained from various assignments augmented by education through a series of military schools. Mexico has a professional officer corps that is well educated and has experience from a successful counterinsurgency campaign against guerrillas in the state of Guerrero in the 1970's. In addition, the military leadership has been coopted by the government through the upward socio-economic mobility to be gained from a military career making the military leadership dedicated to supporting the government. Another factor in Mexico's favor in the conduct of counterinsurgency operations is the 250,000 trained reservists who could be called to active duty to augment the regular armed forces. These reservists could replace regular forces in order to perform internal security functions when the active units are transferred to the combat zone. Also, discharged reservists could provide a large body of semi-trained soldiers in the event of a rapid expansion of the armed forces. The reservists as well

as members of the Rural Guard who are predominantly from remote rural areas provide the military with a valuable source of human intelligence. These forces know the terrain and people in their areas and could provide essential intelligence to military forces in counter guerrilla operations. Also, the Rural Guard could serve as the core of a viable civil defense program to protect the rural areas from the insurgents; however, better weapons and communications equipment would need to be provided to these forces. Another possible asset is Mexico's geographical location next to the United States - many Mexicans feel this is a liability and could lead to a United States involvement in Mexican affairs. The United States would view the establishment of a hostile Marxist - Leninist government as inimical to its national interest and would provide considerable economic and military assistance in support of the Mexican government's counter guerrilla operations.

In conclusion, Mexico is facing a severe economic crisis that may lead to some internal dissention, but the Mexican military is prepared and capable of restoring internal security. In the longer term, Mexico could develop an armed revolution. Many of the factors regarded as indicators of a potential insurgent movement--rising expectation coupled with abject poverty, extremely high unemployment and underemployment rates, increasing disparity between the wealthy and poor, and social injustice--exist today in Mexico. On the other hand, Mexico has democratic institutions that have provided resolution to previous crises, the opposition leadership has been incorporated into the legal democratic process, and the Mexican government in the tradition of the Mexican Revolution follows a moderately leftist political platform that coopts much of the liberal opposition. Against a small scale

insurgency, Mexico has the resources to win as demonstrated in the Guerrero experience in the 1970's. Against a widespread insurgency, should one develop, Mexico would experience many difficulties. The small army and lack of tactical mobility and firepower would constrain the effectiveness of counter guerrilla operations and require a massive buildup of arms and personnel to defeat the insurgency. At the present time Mexico's armed forces appear to be sufficiently organized, equipped and disposed to meet its constitutional mission of defending the sovereignty and independence of Mexico, protecting the constitution and laws, and ensuring internal security.

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